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Interview with Katherine (Coffin) “Kay” Mills by Andrea L’Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Mills, Katherine Louise (Coffin) “Kay”

Interviewer

L’Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

May 29, 2001

Place

Farmington, Maine

ID Number

MOH 272

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Biographical Note

Katherine Louise “Kay” (Coffin) Mills was born in Ashland, Maine on February 24, 1917. Her parents, Lawrence Smith Coffin and Katherine (Trafton) Coffin, were potato farmers in Aroostook County. She attended Colby College, became a teacher at Mt. Blue High School in Farmington, Maine, and knew Margaret Chase Smith well. Her husband, S. Peter Mills, II, was U.S. Attorney for Maine. Her children include: Paul Mills, S. Peter Mills, III, Dora Ann Mills, Janet Mills, and David Mills.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background; Aroostook County; Colby College; becoming a teacher; Uncle Bert, the town doctor; Margaret Chase Smith; Lyndon B. Johnson; Declaration of Conscience; Ashland traditions; teaching memories; and the CCC.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Mrs. Katherine Mills on May 29th, the year 2001, at her home in Farmington, Maine. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. If you could start just by giving me your full name, including your maiden name, and where and when you were born.

Katherine Mills: Well, I was born Katherine Louise Coffin, C-O-F-F-I-N, in Ashland, Maine on February 24th, 1917.

AL: And did you grow up in Ashland?

KM: And I grew up in Ashland, yes. And I graduated from Ashland High School, then I went down to Ricker Junior College for one year. Then I stayed out one year, and then transferred to Colby College, graduating from there in 1939.

AL: And in Ashland, what were your parents' names?

KM: My father's name was Lawrence Smith Coffin, and my mother was Katherine Trafton

Coffin. My dad was very much interested in local government. He told me once that when he was only twenty-one years old, the youngest you could hold office in those days, that he was elected to become one of the selectmen of the town of Ashland. And he held a town office from then until the day he died. When he died he was the town clerk, but my mother was his deputy. So when he died, the town elected my mother as town clerk. She held that position until she was eighty years old, and then she said her eyes were failing her and she didn't want to do it any longer.

AL: So they were politically active in Ashland.

KM: Well, yes.

AL: And as you were growing up did you sort of, did they talk about issues at home? Did you get an understanding of what was happening in the town?

KM: As I recall, things were pretty routine. I don't remember any great controversial issues there. No, I don't remember that. And of course as town clerk, and he was town clerk most of the time, I think, when I was growing up, he wasn't involved with controversial matters that I recall.

AL: What was his occupation?

KM: Oh, he was a potato farmer, like everybody else practically in Aroostook county in those days. Yes, we were lucky. We had, my sister and my brother and I grew up on this potato farm, but it was not out in the country. It was two hundred acres right off the main street of Ashland. And, you know, we had a pair of work horses and we had cows, occasionally some pigs. My father didn't care much for chickens, but occasionally we'd have some. But it was pretty tough when I became a teenager because, you see, then we entered the Depression years. And, of course, I recall those, because I was worried for fear I wouldn't be able to go to college. But my mother was always optimistic in insisting that we're going to college, my brother and my sister and I. And so, I do recall, however, we had to borrow money from, of course, the federal government.

And it was those, the beginning of those years when the federal government would pay you for not raising a crop, or they would pay you, as they did my dad, for raising it. But then when there was no market for it, and I remember several years when potatoes were only, you could only get maybe twenty-five dollars a barrel. Then the government would say, "Put a purple die on them and go throw them into the Aroostook River," which practically bordered our farm. That's what he did.

But somehow my, because of my mother's urgings and optimism and faith, I guess you'd call it, even though, even so, my brother was able to attend Bowdoin. He graduated from Bowdoin in 1930 and then he went to Washington, D.C. and attended George Washington School of Law from which he graduated, and he worked in the Congressional Library, the Library of Congress. But the height of his, my brother's career, was to become the head of the Law Library in the Library of Congress. So he never did go out and practice law, but because he was a lawyer he

was able to become head of the Law Library of the Library of Congress. And he did some traveling, in fact, you know, through UNESCO, he visited the bibliothèques of the capital cities in Europe. So I've always been pretty proud of my brother.

AL: And what was his name?

KM: Lewis Coffin. He died about fourteen years ago. But his widow and I are very, very close. He married a woman who was also in library work. But she grew up, she was born and she grew up in Denmark, lived in Copenhagen and, anyway, she still spends her summers here right near me. But, let's see, what else did you want to know, Andrea?

AL: Well, a follow up question about your brother. It sounds like such an interesting career, especially with my leanings as a librarian, but did he ever relate to you some of the more interesting aspects of his work?

KM: Oh, I'm sure he did, but I've not thought about them for years. He lived in Washington and I used to go there to visit him and his wife, but I really can't remember right offhand any of the stories that he told me. But I know he met a great many, of course, of the congressmen and the senators because it was that section of the library, naturally, that they would use the most.

AL: Now, because of your relationship with Margaret Chase Smith, did he have a contact or liaison with her?

KM: Not particularly, no, no, he didn't have a liaison with her as my husband, Peter Mills and I had with her.

AL: Now, what were the schools like in Aroostook county at that time?

KM: Oh, well ours in Ashland was very needy. I remember we had one room in the high school that someone called a library, but it was nothing but abandoned civics books and one out-, maybe one set of encyclopedias worn out. I remember that because I felt so hungry for, to read good literature and all that. I can remember I couldn't wait to go away to college where I could really immerse myself in Literature, with a capital 'L'. And I, my mother was on the school board for a number of years in Ashland so through that, and then through a cousin of my dad's, Kate Coffin Hillson Pelkey, I was able to get, you know, a great many interesting books to read. She lived right near us.

And, but I don't remember that we had anything really that amounted to what you'd really call a library at the high school. And the town library was across the street in the back of somebody's grocery store. I remember Grace Livingston Hill, and what was her name, somebody Temple, you know, light romantic stuff that. A little bit went a long way, but it really wasn't what you'd call a library. We certainly could have used money from some philanthropist like Carnegie, but I don't think he'd ever heard of Ashland. So I really had a tremendous thirst and curiosity to read, and I couldn't fulfill it really until I went down to Ricker and then went on to Colby.

In fact in Ashland, all the grades and the high school were all in one wooden building. I don't

think we had kindergarten, at least not when I was there, I started first grade. But we had grades one through twelve in one wooden building, and I could walk to it in about five minutes' time. And we always went home at noon time. Those who lived way out in the country had to bring their school lunches, and of course no school provided lunches in those days. But we had our main meal at noon. I went home, and so did my sister who was three and a half years younger than I, and we ate with my mother and father. We had our hearty meal of the day at noon. And at night, you know, there was not the wide choice that you have now, that I have, we all have now for meals. But rather it was always, "Well, let's see, how shall we cook the potatoes tonight, shall we fry them, with or without onions, or shall we bake potatoes?" And then we'd have some strawberry sauce or some kind of preserve that my mother would have put up. On Sundays we had ice cream, though of course oftentimes we made it ourselves, since we were living on a farm.

And the school was so different from today. I was thinking about it this morning, how a man by the name of Joe Collier was for many, many years the janitor. We didn't call them "custodians" in those days, that was a euphemism I think that came into being later. But he was the janitor and he did everything around that school. And in the winter time, to keep the school from freezing up he usually had to sleep there down in, we called it the basement, you know, to stoke the furnace with the coal. And I can remember he was always black with coal dust. I suppose it permeated his skin, but what a far cry from today. And we had no school buses. So he was, you know, he was the one that, he was maintenance I guess you call them today, for that building, grades one through twelve.

And our pastimes after school were very quiet. I mean, typically, my sister and I would go home and we'd have friends come in, this was in the middle grades and then high school, and we'd make fudge night after night, especially in the winter time. And then if the weather was right we'd go skiing with friends across the back end of the farm. There was a valley and we could make a ski slope, a jump rather, which the boys would go over, the girls wouldn't. And of course our skis had to be kept on by inner tubes. There was a garage near us and we used to go over there and beg for their inner tubes, which they generously supplied. And we'd cut them into strips and put them around our feet and fasten ourselves that way into the skis.

But one of my early impressions is, when I was in grade one, I can remember after dinner I had started up the hill to go back to the school and I suddenly saw an airplane flying overhead. And I thought, this is much more important than anything I'm going to do the rest of the day, and I stood there and watched that plane wheel around, circle around, fascinated. Let my imagination, you know, go with it as it were, and try to imagine what it would be like to fly in that plane. And as a result, finally I decided it was too late to go to school for the afternoon, so I went home and told my mother what I'd done. She was very sympathetic, she let me stay home the rest of the day.

AL: Well, what did you do in the evenings for social activity?

KM: We played cards a lot, and caroms, and, but we played cards a lot with my mother and my father and different boyfriends and girlfriends. But when I was five or six years old, I well remember my father bringing home a radio and I was thrilled. And I think somebody selling

them there had loaned him one, so we just had one temporarily and then later he got one. But, I recall so vividly my dad having me sit down, it was seven o'clock at night, and he said, "Listen to this." And through the static I could understand there was a baseball game. And I said, "But it's dark here, you know, where, the sun has set, where is this?" He says, "In California." And he explained to me about the difference in time and it made, you know, an indelible impression upon me that I could listen to a baseball game in California when it was seven o'clock in Ashland, Maine. I'll never forget that.

Then later he bought a radio, and one of my pleasant memories too, of it, is sitting down with my dad every Sunday night, I think it was quarter of seven to seven, to listen to Will Rogers. And he had a ninety-eight cent, that's what he claimed he paid for it anyway, alarm clock. And of course at the end, it's well known I guess that at the end of that fifteen minutes the alarm clock would go off and we'd have to say goodnight to Will Rogers and wait for another week in order to hear him.

But I can remember I enjoyed his humor and his political comments, though I was shocked when somebody said, he was so popular that someone suggested that some day we ought to run Will Rogers for president. But then, I never dreamed we'd run an actor like Ronald Reagan for president either, or a haberdasher like Harry Truman. So maybe he would, I guess he would have made a good president. But we never dreamed about putting a cowboy, and a comedian, into the White House. I mean, not in my mind did I ever dream of it, anyway. But it's too bad we didn't.

AL: Did you have in, what, or maybe I should ask, was there any place in town that was a central meeting place, a grange or the church, or where was the social activity of the town centered?

KM: Well, in those days you didn't, nobody worried much about a place for children and teenagers to meet. I mean, we didn't have it. There was a grange hall; I was not a member of the grange then, I am now. I joined the Farmington grange after I was married. But we went to grange suppers, and I can remember my father's favorite dessert was whipped cream cake. I haven't seen one in years, but it was a layer cake, a yellow cake as I recall, and you put whipped cream in between the layers and all over the top, and then you refrigerated it overnight. Yeah, I could do that, couldn't I?

AL: It sounds good.

KM: It sounds simple, too, but I don't know, I've never made one. But I remember that was one of our favorite desserts at the Saturday night grange hall suppers. And of course the grange always put a meal on town meeting day. And usually we had the day off and I remember going to town meeting and that day off. I don't know as we had it off every day, but there must have been some times we had. Well, and then let's see, we had a movie theater right near my house. As I say, this was a two hundred acre farm, my had twenty acres of it into potatoes, and there was a big raspberry field, everybody in town got raspberries out of that, we never thought about denying them that, putting up no trespassing signs. You didn't do that in those days, you shared.

And my dad was one who liked to hunt and fish. But in those days you didn't take your daughters with you, no, you wouldn't. I mean, I'm sure today he would, but, and so we always had, he always got his deer every year. And I remember E. B. White when he first came from Mt. Vernon, New York up to Maine to live said that people kept saying, "Have you got your deer yet?" He wasn't used to that, and he laughed at the idea of some, he pictured some deer running around through the woods with his name on it.

AL: Let's skip ahead to Colby College. Now you spoke about really thirsting, a curiosity of knowledge, and you say you found that when you went -

KM: Oh yes, at Ricker Junior College and, which no longer exists unfortunately, but also at Colby, yes. And I recall, too, that, oh, I just loved studying there, and loved the professors. And having had to stay out one year, too, made a difference. I had to stay out, I didn't have the money to go to Colby at the time.

But I also was anemic and I found out later that at Ricker Junior College the chef, I don't imagine he was professionally trained, you know, I don't know what the requirements were to be a chef then, but I think he put saltpeter in the food. And the boys worked in the kitchen and they used to say to me, "Why are you eating those biscuits? Don't you see all those big lumps of saltpeter in the biscuits?" And I said, "Well, I assume it's flour." And they said, "No, no, the chef out there is putting saltpeter in the food." Now these are Depression years, I didn't have money to go down the street in Houlton and buy another meal. And of course I was, naturally at eighteen I had a big appetite, as usually they say. Traditionally the freshmen in college do have a big appetite and so on. And so, and then the gravy on the potato, they'd say, "Oh don't eat that." The boys who, at the table, said, "Don't eat that." And they knew what they were talking about. This happened to three of us girls from Ashland that went down to Ricker Junior College in three successive years. And we compared notes in later years and found out every one of us had to take a year off because we were so anemic.

AL: Wow, and that was caused by the -?

KM: Well, I never could prove it, see. I'm not a lawyer and nobody brought suits in those days about that sort of thing. I do know that a girl I was very close to who later roomed with me at Colby told me that she was weak and sick while she was still at Ricker Junior College, and she went to a local doctor, and she'd heard that they put saltpeter in the food. And so the doctor went to see the head, her doctor went to see the head of Ricker Junior College, Mr. Hayes. And Mr. Hayes says, "Oh no, I'm sure they don't, I eat there every Sunday." Well, in any case, she had to stay out a year and she was anemic. And in the third year, we found out in later years, there was a third girl from Ashland who had to stay out for the same reason.

It sure ruined my health there for about two years, because even when I went down to Colby for my sophomore, junior and senior years, I can remember that every afternoon I couldn't keep my eyes open. See, my doctor was my uncle, and he had said, "You've got to take a nap." Well, you know, you tell that to an eighteen year old, you take a nap every afternoon, and go to bed at ten o'clock. But I did because I respected his professional advice, and he was like a second father to me anyway. Well then when I went down to Colby, I can remember I tried to sign up

for morning courses. I couldn't keep my eyes open after one-thirty. Sometimes I'd sneak in a little nap after lunch and then go to my, I remember a psychology class that began at two o'clock and I'd sit there and look at the professor, wouldn't even see her. But that was why, and it took me two or three years to get over that. And these other girls the same.

AL: And what was your experience like at Colby, did you have any professors that stand out in your mind?

KM: Oh yeah, Carl J. [Jefferson] Weber, Carl J. Weber. He had taught at Annapolis and he had a ramrod straight back and a professional air. I just admired him so much. He demanded perfection.

AL: What did he teach?

KM: English. Oh, well, I'm trying to think now what the specific courses were. I think there was course in American literature and, you know I can't remember what the other ones were that he particularly taught. But I mean, I had him more than once. I think he was my, maybe my advisor, but I won't forget him right away. And he knew how to embarrass us, too, sometimes, but I got sort of a kick out of it. Some of the girls would cry. For example, I can remember his asking our class once, "How many of you have been to Boston?" It was probably rather, how many of you have never been to Boston, and a boy from Jackman, Maine and me, and I from Aroostook, raised our hands, we'd never been to Boston and here we were twenty, nineteen, twenty years old. But, I don't know, I just respected him so much, he was really my favorite.

And also I admired him because he was a world authority presumably on Thomas Hardy, I mean he wrote books on Thomas Hardy and I presume they're on the library shelves today, and he even, you know, took at least one trip I know of to England to interview Thomas Hardy's widow, you know, and that sort of literary research, I think, just amazed me. I mean I'd seen nothing like that in Ashland, Maine. And I think he respected me, and I respected him.

I know he asked me to type something once for one of the books he was writing. And I was an amateur typist at best, but by golly I labored, and it was quite a lot of typing I had to do for him. So, and he didn't want to hire, he said, the professional typist downtown in Waterville, because they weren't too responsible. So believe me, I worked so hard to have that typed up perfectly. So he announced to the class one day, "Well, Katherine Coffin has typed this long article for me and there isn't one typo in it, and I'm pretty proud of her." You know, well, couldn't have said anything that pleased me more. And I was doubly pleased when he came out on the skating rink one day and asked me to skate. And he was an older man, he was old enough to be my dad.

And Mary Marshall was an outstanding professor there, too. She taught English lit, or British lit, and Chaucer, those are the only ones I had from her. I think it was Chaucer, Spenser and Milton that were combined in those days.

AL: Were there a lot of them, there weren't many woman professors at that time, were there?

KM: No, there were, as I remember predominantly men.

AL: Did you have a chance to interact with the Waterville community at all, or were you really sort of separate?

KM: Separate in those days. There were some girls who were taking education courses that said they would like a chance to do some student training in the local schools, but just a few of them did it. One friend of mine went to Winslow and got a great deal out of her experience. But I don't recall any connection between, it's far different nowadays, I know, because I'm sure a great many people outside of Colby go there to use the athletic facilities, the skating rinks and oh, swimming pool at Colby I understand, but in those days no, I don't recall any such connection.

Of course, the rules were rather strict, too, I mean we had to, we girls anyway had to stay in the dorm after seven-thirty at night. I can't remember, it seems as though maybe once a week, or maybe it was twice, we could go out. But we had to sign out, they had to know where we were going. And I can remember once I went to a, way, I had to walk some distance, to go the theater to see the particular movie I wanted to see, and it didn't let out until eleven. And so, of course, I was supposed to be home in the dorm by eleven, and it took me fifteen minutes to walk back. And I got caught at it. And, anyway, so I was campused for a week.

AL: Is that kind of like grounded?

KM: Yeah, it's being grounded, we called it campused in those days, but yeah.

AL: What made you choose to go to Colby? Did you, is that the one you just wanted, or did you look at some others?

KM: Oh I, yes, I was admitted to University of Maine Orono, but I had a teacher in high school who taught, I had both Latin and French from her, Rose Tilly. She had graduated from Colby and she was a Colby enthusiast. And any of us that she thought held any promise at all, to make the grade that is, she would make contacts for us with Colby. And so I just naturally thought, well I had to go to Colby if I went anywhere.

So, but also, you know, Ricker Junior College and Ricker Classical Institute in Houlton [Maine] which, as I say, no longer exist, were founded by Baptists, as was Colby College. And so one demonstration of the connection between the two was that every year Ricker gave a scholarship to one boy and one girl that were transferring to Colby. And I won that, I was awarded that scholarship. And they were nice enough too, to hold it over for me so that when I had to stay home for lack of money and because I was suffering from anemia, I had it the next year. It amounted to, I think it amounted to half my tuition, but remember you could go in those days through Colby for about a thousand dollars a year. The tuition however, I'm talking about board and room, tuition, as I remember it changed while I was there, but I think it was like two hundred, maybe three, between two and three hundred dollars. And then it went up before I graduated.

But I remember when I graduated from Colby in June of '39 I owed somebody, I think it was a

sorority that had loaned me some money and I owed them five hundred dollars. Today that sounds like peanuts, but in those days it was half the cost of a whole semester at college. And so it took me a while to get that paid off. I think my husband helped me, too, after that.

AL: Is that where you met your husband, at Colby?

KM: Yes and no. The reason I knew about Peter Mills is that his brother Bill Mills went through Bowdoin with my brother Lewis Coffin, and they were college chums. Then they went on to Washington together. Bill Mills graduated in '39 from, not '39, I mean graduated in '29 from Bowdoin but, and he went on to Syracuse University for a year. And then, meanwhile my brother graduated in 1930. And the two of them decided that they would buy a car, which they did, from Backus Garage here in Farmington, for twenty-five dollars, and they drove that to Washington where they both enrolled at the George Washington School of Law.

And then, so I, and then Bill Mills used to come up to Aroostook with my brother to visit and he talked to me a great deal about, he'd tell stories about his brother Peter. So I already had this curiosity and somewhat spirit of admiration all built up within me before I ever met him. But, and then when Peter graduated from Colby, he graduated in the middle of the year, 19-, I mean something like January '34 he'd finished his requirements, and so the dean called him in and said, "You can graduate if you want to this month." Well, officially he graduated, of course later he came back for commencement ceremonies, but. So in January he wondered what to do and so he just went to Washington and joined my brother and his brother down there. And I can't remember, seems as though he took some courses at George Washington Law School too, but I know he graduated from B.U.

So anyway, so I used to hear about Peter Mills through my brother and Peter's brother. And then, well Peter had graduated from Colby in 1934, and you see he graduated before I ever went there, because I already had one year under my belt at Ricker Junior College. But apparently his brother had told him to come look up Katherine Coffin, Lewis' sister. And eventually we did. Eventually he called me up and asked to take me to some football games at Colby. He was working in Augusta at the time, I think he was a clerk of some legislative committee for a year. So eventually I did see him and meet him there at Colby, but it was through the influence of our brothers.

AL: In what year did you move to Farmington?

KM: Well, let's see, I graduated from Colby in '39, and then I taught at Warren High School in Warren, Maine one year. And then I went to South Paris, to Paris High School which is something else now, it's combined of course with the Norway.

AL: Is it Oxford Hills?

KM: It's now called Oxford Hills, yes. And, but at that time South Paris had a separate, had its own high school, and I taught there for a year. Then in, (*tape blip*) to answer your question, in June 1941, we were married. Then I came here to live.

AL: What was it like coming to Farmington after having grown up in Aroostook County?

KM: Well, it's interesting. I'd always had a curiosity about Farmington, never dreaming I'd ever spend most of my life here, because when I was in high school I remember reading one of those pamphlets, publicity, I suppose they're put out by some publicity bureau, you know, in Augusta. And it said Farmington, Maine and Camden, Maine are regarded as probably two of the prettiest towns in the state of Maine. But living way up there in Aroostook county where we had to import the lobsters, and that was a rare occasion, I used to think, "Oh, how wonderful it would be to go see Camden or Farmington," but never dreaming that I ever would.

But, so I was most enthusiastic about coming to Farmington to live. And luckily, too, Peter's father owned a house right across from the college campus, it was 62 High Street then. Of course, the number's been changed now, but I felt as if we were practically living on campus, and in fact in later years, back in the seventies, I sold it to the college and it became the psychology department for the college. And I, it's a historical house because Mr. Rounds lived there. I know my son, Paul Mills, has done some research and he thinks that house ought to be preserved, not because I lived there, or he lived there, but it has had a long history before that. Paul tells me the house was built in the 1840s, and that's what we suspected anyway due to newspapers and other things we found when we first moved in there in '41. We bought the house from Peter's father and lived there for quite a few years. But I understand they're going to tear it down anyway, and I don't know -

AL: Unless somebody makes it a historical landmark?

KM: I don't, yes, I'm afraid there won't be time to work on that. I don't know what's going to happen on that. Oh, and I remember that High Street was so beautiful. There were many, many elms which later fell prey, you know, to the Dutch elm disease, and they were so tall and beautiful. And they overarched, you know, that whole High Street there, all through the area of what is now the UMF campus. I miss those elms. Beautiful. But we did enjoy living there because we were close to the college.

And above all we were just across the street from, or later anyway, from the beautiful library that was constructed. And it meant a lot to my children and me, particularly Paul, because Paul always, from the time he was, he started school practically, enjoyed doing, you know, detailed research. And I remember the librarian telling me when Paul was in grade five or six that Paul would come into the library and say, "May I go down into the stacks?" Not everybody was allowed. And he was so little, but he'd go, "I want to go downstairs if I may to, may I go down to the stacks, I want to research," and he would tell them exactly what he was going to research down there. And they told me they always trusted him and let him go. So it was like, the library at the college was sort of like an extension of our living room. We enjoyed that very much.

AL: Was this the town library, or the college library?

KM: The college library. The town library, of course, was where it is now, up the hill a little, across from the American Legion.

AL: Did you know the librarian at one time, her last name was [Agnes] Manter?

KM: Oh yes, oh yes.

AL: Can you tell me a little bit about her?

KM: She was considered, I guess, an outstanding Democrat here in town. And I, I didn't know her socially, I mean I just knew her as the librarian, and she was highly respected and admired. And in fact, she was renting an apartment in the house where Peter Mills now lives, but wasn't living in it then. She died there in his apartment, in his house, I guess she rented the whole house. I think she, yes, I think she rented the whole house, but anyway she died I think in, I don't know if she died in her sleep, she died there in that house. I can remember it was quite a blow to us. But she was quite a, a highly respected member of the community.

AL: Now, did politics quickly become a big part of your life when you moved to Farmington?

KM: Did what?

AL: Politics?

KM: Oh, politics, well yes. Of course I had five children, and so I was quite busy at home, believe me, but I remember going out with my husband when he was politicking, as we say. And I drove him to Strong to the, Strong, Maine where they usually held a Lincoln Day dinner for the Republicans. Then, he was in the House and then he was in the Senate, and I can't remember, Paul could tell me I guess, he can remember better than I, how many terms he served. But right at the beginning, of course, we were only married six months when Pearl Harbor struck, you have to remember. We were married in June, '41, and Peter was, he was in the Naval Reserve as a sailor.

And I remember coming home, we'd been out for a Sunday drive and when we came home, that would be 62 High Street, one part of it, it was a separate apartment that we rented to the Benson family. And I remember Mrs. Benson, it was seven o'clock at night, and she came running over to our side and said, "Have you heard the news?" And we said, "What news?" And she said, "Well, the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." As a result, Peter left the next morning for Boston to apply for a commission, which he eventually received. And by March, and on March 1st, as I recall, March 1st, 1942 he had been commissioned, he was on his way to Fort Sklar, New York for special officer's training. And he came home in June. And I taught meanwhile at Farmington High School, well in a building that became later called the Ingall's School which is now an office building.

AL: Is it?

KM: And, I taught there that one year, that would be 1941-42. And then in June he finished his officer's training, he had to leave, and he was assigned to the Boston Navy Yard, and so I joined him and went down there. And we lived in Watertown, sharing an apartment with a friend of my aunt's, just for the summer.

But to make the summer worthwhile, I knew I'd be alone a lot otherwise, I signed up for a course at Harvard, and the professor was Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. I heard about him, because I knew he had produced, written his own history of the United States, and we used that as a text. So I felt honored to sit in his classroom that summer. I didn't do it for credit, I just did it for the, one of those short courses, I just did it because I wanted to hear and see this famous man.

But then I decided, I decided not to go back to Farmington High School because I wanted to be with my husband as long as possible. We were newlyweds after all. So I just, I went in and applied for a job teaching from some teacher's agency in Boston, and they sent me for an interview down to Hingham, Mass.. So I was interviewed down there by the superintendent who later, by the way, wound up as the head of the education department at UMO, and it was one of those hyphenated names. Porter-Shirley, Porter-Shirley is what comes to mind, but that doesn't sound quite right either, so I don't know.

But anyway, I was so amused because he, I went, he wrote me, he said, "Oh, I want you to come back, I have to take it up with the board." And he wrote me a letter a few days later, which I received up there in Watertown, and he says, "Yes, the board and I want you to come down and teach at Hingham High School," which was on the south shore, that's why I'm saying down I guess. And, you know, he said, "Now because you're married, you'll have to be considered a substitute teacher and I can only offer you substitute wages." Now the substitute wages were only five dollars a day. I didn't like the idea of their discriminating against me because I was married. And so I wrote him a letter and I said I didn't, I refused to be considered a basement bargain just because I'm married. And he called up, I know my face was red when I heard his voice, I was shier in those days than I grew to be later, and he was laughing his head off at my letter. And he said, "Would you come for eight dollars a day?" Well, eight dollars a day was the going wage for a teacher. They'd still have to call me a substitute teacher, but I'd be a permanent substitute. And I said, "Yes."

So we moved down to Hingham. But then that, I didn't realize I was, I had just become pregnant. And so, anyway, and then I had the flu and I had to have my mother come look after me. Because, of course, Peter had to go report every day to the Boston Navy Yard, and my mother had to come all the way down from Ashland to Hingham to help look after me. Because we didn't have an apartment, we just had rooms in somebody's house, and being pregnant and having the flu. You didn't go into the hospitals in those days, they would discourage you unless you were dying, because they were busy recruiting the doctors, you see, and so there was such a shortage. So I remember I had to stay in this room and not go into a hospital, at least that's what I felt. So my mother looked after me anyway, and, but, so by December I decided I couldn't, I just didn't feel well enough to teach, I was quite nauseated, so I had to resign after just three or four months there in Hingham.

AL: I'm going to stop and turn the tape over real quick.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on side B of the interview with Mrs. Katherine Mills.

KM: I'd like to revert back for just a moment to Aroostook county, my growing up there. My uncle was a well known doctor, the only doctor, and he had a snowmobile. Well, of course, you had to put up cars in the fall, but what you called a snowmobile in those days resembled in no way at all what you'd call a snowmobile today. But I have occasionally seen pictures of snowmobiles like the one my uncle had custom built. And it had a caterpillar tread on the back, you know, and then there were still, no, they were on the front, and then four wheels in the back as I remember, four wheels in the back and a caterpillar, no, caterpillar tread, what am I thinking of? No, it was skis in front, like skis and a caterpillar tread in the back, and it was black, and it turned over, you know, upset easily, but he never was hurt in it. But he was the only one that had a vehicle that could travel through the winter, you see. Before that he had to travel by horse and sleigh, horse and pung, he had a full time man a chauffeur, had to, you know, be able to go out in all kinds of weather and so on. But I remember kind of vividly that so-called snowmobile he had custom made. He used to offer me rides in it and I rode in it once or twice and I was so afraid it would upset, and I had claustrophobia thinking about it because the whole back end was all enclosed, you know.

But then another thing, to growing up in Aroostook, I didn't feel for, you know, that I was living in a place that was so isolated from cultural activities and advantages until perhaps when I was in high school. I remember somebody wrote a book called, Aroostook: Our Last Frontier. And suddenly I started identifying myself, you know, with the western movies I was seeing for a dime every Saturday night at the local theater. And I remember the store fronts had those false fronts, in Ashland, on the main street, just as they do in those western movies, those false fronts.

Then one other vivid memory, too, was that Ashland was founded in 1837. My great-grandfather, Eben Trafton moved up there from Newfield, Maine in 18-, well he left home in 1839, spent a year at Mattawamkeag I think, working in somebody's store, but in 1840 he went up to Ashland, so he was one of those early settlers. He lived there all his life. I never met him, of course. Well, he lived to a good ripe age, but my mother used to speak about him, it was her grandfather and she was very fond of him. But what I was getting, my point is that I remember being home the summer of 1937, because I participated in helping celebrate the centennial of Ashland, Maine.

AL: Now your uncle was the town doctor.

KM: Yes, yeah.

AL: Did you ever get an idea of what it was like to be a doctor then? It must have been so different than it is today.

KM: It was, yes, very different. He was written up a number of times, even during his lifetime, and then after he, he died the year I was married, in 1941, and they still wrote him up. He was such, it was such a remarkable life. And since he died in 1941, then you remember there was a shortage of doctors anyway after Pearl Harbor, they had trouble getting somebody to come in there and fill his shoes. They finally got somebody who was an osteopath to come in. But I

can remember my uncle, Uncle Bert, telling me some stories, I mean such as, you know, they would call his, they called his house and he was called out to Sheridan once. Well, Sheridan is part of Ashland now, but, used to be a big, big mill there. Well anyway, he was called down to Sheridan and the family said, "Oh, come quickly, come quickly, our mother has, her mouth has all turned black." And he rushed down there, and it was, you know, several miles by a horse and pung, only to find out that she'd been eating blueberries and there was nothing wrong.

And then also I can remember one, he told us once, and this has been written up, but one of his roughest days was when, it was in the winter, and he had his chauffeur harness the horse and he went to Portage which is ten miles north of Ashland, where I spent most of my summers. He drove to Portage and delivered a baby. And then he went up to Masardis, which is ten miles south, and delivered a baby. And then he was called back to, I think he delivered something like six babies there in a twenty-four hour period, and the radius was like forty miles, you know, by horse. It's no wonder that he died of a heart attack in his early sixties. He knew he had heart problems, he went to Boston and found out he had serious heart problems. He was told there to give up his practice, but he, but he wouldn't, I mean he, he was devoted, you know, to the health of the, and he was the only one around. And the nearest hospital, of course, was Presque Isle and that was twenty miles away. And also he was called over to Mapleton a great deal, that's, as you know that's between Ashland and Presque Isle. So he died of a heart attack when he was fairly young, well, younger than me, early sixties.

AL: You said his first name was Bert?

KM: Yeah, Albert [B.] Hagerthy, and he was an uncle by marriage, he married my mother's sister, Belle Trafton. But he was like a second father to me, he was wonderful to our family. And we lived near, my grandmother, too, after she was widowed lived with him and her daughter Belle, but they were nearby, you know. And so I had a, I saw my grandmother almost every day and, of course, my aunt and my uncle.

AL: Now when did you first meet Margaret Chase Smith?

KM: The first time I really heard about her, by the way, I like to remember because I remember that Peter's father, Sumner Mills, told me one day, he said, "I had a visitor this morning." And my father-in-law was one who practiced law in Farmington for many years, but also he loved to have chickens around, some livestock, and a garden. And he put on his old overalls early in the morning as he customarily did, so it might have been in the spring of the year. And he had gone out to, I guess, feed the chickens and work in the garden. And then he looks up and he, "Oh," he said, "I looked up and I saw this very stunning young woman coming along with her heels, in her heels, and she announced she was Margaret Chase Smith." Now I don't know what year this was, I don't know what she was running for. But he was so impressed with her, I remember, he came and told us about it.

And then, I don't remember the first time I ever met Margaret, I probably went to hear her speak somewhere, I don't know, it just blends in. But, because we became particularly close after, in 1953 when she named Peter Mills to be the U.S. Attorney. That is, they called, it was popularly, the office was popularly called District Attorney, but that term is reserved, doing something else

in other states and technically I was told it's U.S. Attorney. And so we moved to Gorham because Peter's office then was the federal building in Portland.

So then, when Margaret would want to fly up from Washington, you see, we were conveniently near so that she would say, "Well can, Peter, could you and Kay meet me at the airport? I have a speaking engagement somewhere in the area." And we would pick her up and take her to it. I remember that she would frequently stop en route at like a Dairy Queen and buy a big milkshake, and that probably was much better for her stomach than trying to eat anything else because she was getting ready to speak, you see, and probably had skipped lunch, that might have been, I don't know, lunch too maybe. And we frequently took one of our boys with us on such a venture, so all the boys got acquainted, all three boys, Peter, David and Paul got acquainted with her.

And then, during WWII, of course Peter was gone for over four years in the Navy, and one thing I remember that's outstanding as far as I'm concerned, was her consideration. You know, you can say, 'Oh well, she was a very considerate person,' and she was. But can you imagine New Year's Eve, I'm sitting at home with two babies, one or two, I mean depending on what year we're talking about, but this is early 1940s. See, I was married in '41 and I had a baby in '43, another one in '45. And with a wood burning furnace, you know, I was confined to the house in cold weather a lot just to keep the fires going and keep the babies, keep them on schedule and so forth, look after their health. But New Year's Eve for at least two years during WWII, Margaret Smith called me in the middle of the evening and said she was thinking about me because she knew that my husband was gone. He was in the Atlantic, out in the Atlantic for about two years, and then he was in the Pacific for two years. But it just touched me, because I probably was sitting there feeling pretty lonely and wondering if the war would ever end. I thought, I really thought it was going to go on forever sometimes, it had such an impact on me. But to think that she would call from Washington and just chat casually with me made such a deep impression on me, I'll never forget that.

And then oftentimes when she was going through Farmington or later Gorham where we lived during, for nine years, '53 to '62 we were living in Gorham, she would, you know, stop to call on us. And, of course, oftentimes Bill Lewis was with her because he, if they were traveling by car he would be driving the car usually. I remember how respectful he was of her and her position. He almost always called her "the senator" and once in a while he'd say Margaret, that was in later years maybe, but usually it was Athe senator." And I even said to him one day, they had been, you know, together for quite a long, for several years, but. And I said, "Well, it would be nice to see you two married, but then, Bill, I don't suppose you'd want to go down in history as Mr. Margaret Smith." And I'm sure it wasn't the first time somebody had said it to him, but I thought a great deal of both of them. And once, I knew they were coming to the house here in Farmington, I made toll house cookies and Bill ate and ate and ate those toll house cookies. And I wondered how he could digest them, but then I learned from Margaret later that they were sort of new to his diet and he enjoyed them so much he was sick the next day from overeating them.

And, of course, I remember going to her birthday party, the ninetieth, you know. That was 1987 at the Civic Center in Augusta, wasn't it? Yes, yes, as I remember. And that was a great time.

And I can remember that she, I know she was pleased with the party. But it was her ninetieth birthday, she was born in 1897, this would have been 1987 when we celebrated that, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people there. But I can remember, and I can sympathize with her as I get older myself that, when she got up to thank everybody she says, and please don't do it again, I can't take all of this, or something. It is funny as you get older you have an aversion to crowds. Or if I go into a crowd, I mean, the next day I'm awfully tired. You know, I think I'm not going to be but, and I just appreciate how she felt, and she was treating it more as a joke but I think she meant it, too.

AL: They say she was a great correspondent.

KM: Oh, absolutely.

AL: She wrote just a marvelous amount of letters to constituents. Did you have letters like that with her?

KM: Yes, yes, I've now distributed, those that I kept, you know, I've distributed among the children. But, yes, she was so prompt. I remember when I sent her an announcement of the birth of my first baby. First thing she did was to send me a card, address a note, address a note to him, to the baby. And, we're so glad, something to this effect, you know, we're glad you've arrived, dah-dah-dah, and your family's so very pleased and so on. And then she also sent, twice I think, she sent booties to the babies. But she was always so very, very prompt, it was amazing. Everybody commented on the fact that they, she responded so quickly to their needs. And I know she did, she told me more than once that she, the one thing she regretted about her life was that she had had no children, and she envied me my five.

And in fact, I remember so distinctly going with her, you know, wherever she was going to speak, as I say particularly those days we were in Gorham and she would come up and have us meet her by car and take her. She had such a gift for inspiring, you know, encouragement, optimism, and smiles. Any group or audience, you know, that she was addressing, or any group she'd enter, it might be some, I remember going to Canaan, what is it, Canaan grange hall, you know, people were just, ah, their faces would just relax and they would smile, they'd beam from ear to ear just to see her. And it was more fun for me walking in behind her to watch their reactions. I mean, I've never known anybody who, I've never known anybody who had that much magnetism, really.

AL: What do you think it was? Do you have any impressions of what -?

KM: Well for one, I know, I just assume she had a great deal of empathy for people. If she hadn't had empathy, she would never have known that I needed a phone call from somebody on New Year's Eve and my husband was on a ship out in the Pacific and couldn't call, you know. But I think that people felt that empathy, that is, her ability to identify with each person, and she made you feel that she was talking to you individually. And I think that is so important, especially when you're a politician. She would give a person she was talking to, or that she was listening to, her undivided attention.

And here's another point I want to make, too, that once, I know she was flying across the Atlantic, she'd been across the Atlantic, she was flying home, flying back, and the plane I think had an oil leak and they had to turn around and go back. I don't know the port, it doesn't matter. But, and this was written up in the newspapers at the time. So, but anyway, what she did was to, and actually the passengers were terrified, they didn't know if they were going to drown in the Atlantic or make it back to whatever port they were heading for. But she persuaded them all to sing some old popular, you know, familiar songs, and it just really raised their spirits, and I can see her doing that. I mean, she had an uncanny perceptiveness I think, and, you know.

And she, I think she realized, too, that having five children was a financial burden, but. And so one thing I know she did for our family once. She, as I say, we used to have one of the boys travel with us so they would be, have the pleasure of enjoying her company, too. And my oldest boy, Peter, I can remember so well, he was either a sophomore or junior at Gorham High School, and we had him riding with us to one of her speaking engagements. And I said, she said, "Peter," said to young Peter, "what are your plans?" He says, "I don't know. I just want to go to college somewhere when I graduate from Gorham High School." And she said, "Well look, let me give you some free advice," she says, "take every standard exam that you can and, you know, every standardized test, sign up for them, take them anyway, you never know where it might lead." Well, so he did. He took a lot of tests and she apparently got hold of his scores. And I remember there was one test, I can't remember what it was called, but we were told later that he had the top score in the state of Maine on this standardized test, and he took so many I don't remember what this was. He did well on the SATs, of course, too, but I mean this -

AL: I think he mentions it in his interview.

KM: Really?

AL: Yes, I think.

KM: Which, the -?

AL: The name of the test. I don't remember what it was, but I can refer back to that.

KM: But the next thing we knew, or I, it was February, we got a notice that she appointed him to Annapolis, and we were overwhelmed. Furthermore, I'm frustrated because I just, Dora Ann, she was born January 26th, 1960, and he, Peter, was a junior in Gorham High School at that time. We didn't have time to have an answer, you know, either accept or reject in just two or three weeks' time. And I was nursing a baby, and Peter was really tied up in federal court. We didn't know what to do, we didn't know whether, *he* didn't know whether he wanted to go to Annapolis or not, you know. And we thought, well, do we want him joining the military? I mean, his father spent over four years in the military. And, anyway, the end result was that, we hadn't had time to see what the options were or what Peter really wanted to know or do, and we hadn't had a chance even to take him around to visit different colleges as yet, you see. And so we thought the safest thing to do would be to reject it. We didn't see much of her for a year. She was sensitive about it. And I don't blame her for being sensitive either about that, because that was a tremendous honor anybody should say yes to, I guess. But anyway it was, I remember

that distinctly.

So he, he eventually decided to go to Harvard on an NROTC scholarship. But then, after all, and so he was in the Navy presumably for four years. But then Kennedy froze them in for a fifth year, so he was in the Navy, Peter, young Peter was in the Navy for five years which is a long time to sail around the Pacific, looking for submarines I guess, enemy submarines and I don't know what all what else they did, but. So as a result, I mean, his, he and his wife, he and Meg were married, too, you know, right, just two or three days after he graduated from Harvard. And it was 1965 I think. And they eventually, or she eventually lived in Hawaii and that's where my first, one of my grandchildren was born. I didn't even have the chance to see my grand-, Peter's little girls there, when they were, you know, real little because he was in the Navy out there for five years. But, anyway.

AL: What do you think, well let me go to Senator Muskie. Any recollections you have of meetings you had with him?

KM: Oh, I just remember somebody introducing me to him on the streets of Waterville when he first came into prominence. And I just thought he was such a handsome, imposing man, and tall. And, of course people, some people used to call him Lincolnesque but of course Lincoln was always considered homely and Muskie certainly wasn't. Ed Muskie was, I thought, a very handsome and distinguished man. But I don't remember if I ever heard him speak or not, because I was a Republican in those days. Now I'm a Democrat. But I don't remember too much about him, other than what I read in the papers.

AL: There were never any, were there ever any times when, because for some time Senator Smith and Senator Muskie were both part of the Maine delegation. I wondered if she ever spoke of him, if you have a sense of -?

KM: How she felt toward him?

AL: Yes.

KM: No, I don't remember that. She would have been tactful anyway, in speaking of him, I'm sure. I know she admired Johnson, by the way, President Johnson, which kind of surprised me in a way. And I don't know why, but I thought she spoke admiringly of him and his abilities. And of course we all know Johnson had such a forceful personality, he knew how to get things done. Maybe that's what impressed her, you know.

I know she told me personally, though, about the day that she delivered her Declaration of Conscience against McCarthy. And I could just picture her because I, too, have ridden on that little train that connects the, what's it called, to the, well they don't call it the administrative building but where the offices are held, there's a little railroad. You've probably taken it, too, haven't you? It takes you over to the, oh, the Capitol. And that day that she left her office, you see, and got on that little trolley, I guess they call it a train, it looks more like a trolley car, it happened that McCarthy got on with her. And she said to him, "I am going to speak today before the Senate." And he says, "You are?" And she says, "Yes, and you're not going to like

it.” “Oh, I’m not?” “Nope, you’re not going to like it.” And that was the day she delivered her Declaration of Conscience speech in which she denounced McCarthyism. And it was high time somebody denounced McCarthyism. I’m trying to think, I think it was [June 1] 1950 that she did that. McCarthyism, let’s see, it was not at its height -

AL: That’s pretty close, yeah.

KM: In the early 1950s, yeah. Some day in 1950. I have here before me this book. Of course, it’s by Margaret Smith, it’s called Declaration of Conscience, but Bill Lewis edited it. Yeah, 1950, she denounced the tactics of McCarthyism and extreme right. And I really feel that the history books have not really given her enough credit because, even as I recall, some of the senators who stood by her, and there were just a few of them, and later I think they backed off and they didn’t totally support her. I think she was right out there by her lonesome.

AL: I have an interesting book I studied in college in a course that’s about McCarthyism and talks about Margaret Chase Smith’s role. I can’t think of the name of it at the moment but it is taught, at least in some ways, in college.

KM: It should be, it should be. That took a lot of courage. And you know, and she lost some support from, of course Nixon was all for McCarthy in the, I mean she lost support from some politicians as a result of it, and never should she have. I mean, it was, oh, downright, but you know.

I love this creed, it appears in the front of her book here, her creed for public service, and I think she was very honest about it: “My creed is that public service must be more than doing a job efficiently and honestly . . .” and so on, it goes on. But, Al must be a complete dedication to the people and to the nation with full recognition that every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration.” But this is the part I love, That constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought, that smears are not only to be expected but fought, that honor is to be earned but not bought.” I think today’s politicians ought to read that and consider.

And what I like about this book, too, in the, somewhere near the end of it there’s a, oh, an essay she was asked to write for a book, it was a collection of, I had a copy of it once upon a time. It’s called, This I Believe. Ed Murrow had something to do with it and, but anyway, This I Believe. And she tells about how, yeah, this is associated with Edwin, Ed Murrow. She begins by saying how many nights she goes home from the office or the Senate floor feeling tired and discouraged, and everybody looks, you know, to see, oh, such glory, everybody regards of course the Senate as being a place of such glory and prestige and limelight, but there is another side for the individual senator, of course.

And she says, Al went into public service and politics with my eyes wide open . . . A and so on. And I know she was sensitive to some of the smears, you know, it’s hard to fight, especially when they’re anonymous. But, and she says, Al never realized how vicious they could get and how deeply they could cut, and I sometimes wonder if being a senator is worth all that I put into it . . .” and so on. But then she goes on to tell what she does believe: “I have to ask myself, ‘What am I doing this for?’ And I realize that I’m doing it because I believe in certain things,

things without which life wouldn't mean much to me. I have to believe this, that my life has a real purpose, and that God has assigned to each human being a role in life, that each of us has a purposeful task, that our individual roles are all different but that each of us has the same obligation to do the best that he can." And then, but what I particularly want to point out to you is that she says, well, I like this sentence: "I believe that we should not forget how to disagree agreeably, and how to criticize constructively. I believe with all my heart that we must not become a nation of mental newts blindly following demigods. I believe that we should never become mental mutes with our voices silenced because of fear of criticism of what we might say."

And then her last paragraph I like very much, and I think there's a lesson here for today's politicians: "I believe that in our constant search for security we can never gain any peace of mind until we secure our own soul. And this I do believe above all, especially in my times of greater discouragement, that I must believe, that I must believe in my fellow man, that I must believe in myself, and that I must believe in God if life is to have any meaning." And I think the sincerity, I think she lived according to her principles, and I think that sincerity came through no matter where she was, and that people sensed that, and sensed that she was sincere and that she would never allow anyone to corrupt her. I think there's a great lesson here in her statements for many of today's politicians.

AL: They say that the feeling has changed a lot between the senators and the, you know, that set of senators who are now gone who represented a different era and a different feeling within Congress.

KM: Yeah, well, when you consider how many millions it takes now to run for offices, and particularly for president. It's insane, isn't it? And so much has, there is so much corruption we hear about, usually after it's happened, you know. It's just ridiculous. I mean, I just wish for more people like her. I was looking to see if there's something else here about Margaret that I could add.

AL: Well, let me go back for a minute. I was wondering if there were any family traditions that you had growing up in Ashland and Aroostook county that you carried on into your family as you were raising them here in Farmington and Gorham.

KM: Well, growing up we always celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve in Ashland, but after I was married I discovered, you know, that everybody else practically was celebrating Christmas on Christmas day. We did it because it was such a convenience up there, to hold it, I mean to celebrate Christmas Eve because we had aunts and uncles and close friends of my mother's and father's who liked to come down and see my sister and me open our presents, have our tree. And so, they couldn't have done it during the daytime, and my father had chores to do on the farm, too, so for everybody's convenience we had it Christmas Eve, but I didn't carry that over. No, we followed the, I guess it's a general tradition to celebrate on Christmas day and have the tree and so on.

AL: Was there anything that your mother cooked that you passed on?

KM: Well, she had a recipe for ice cream, because we made that frequently on the farm, of course. And I have her recipe for ice cream, in which she makes a custard first, you know. And I, and of course she used to make a lot of pies, particularly mincemeat. I mean, I never cared that much for mincemeat, but everybody said she made a wonderful mincemeat pie. And of course she always, you wouldn't think of having mincemeat without having it made of venison. So I'm horrified when, today, you know, there's people, they'll have a piece of mincemeat pie but there's no venison in it. But, oh let's see, what else.

I remember once she was working, she was helping in the kitchen at a grange supper. She wasn't a member of the grange but it must, I don't know why she was working there but, in the kitchen, and somebody sent out word, "Hey, what did you put into that coffee? That's the best coffee I ever tasted." Well, she was the one responsible for making the coffee, and she looked around and she, and somebody said, "Hey, where's that pineapple juice that I was going to pour into glasses?" And she says, "Oh, that was pineapple juice? I thought it was water and I put it into the coffee." I don't know what the pineapple juice did to the coffee, I never tried it, but it's a family joke. But, no, I don't remember any particular customs I carried over.

AL: When you were growing up in Aroostook county, were there any political figures that stood out in your mind, or newspaper people, was King Harvey around publishing a newspaper?

KM: I don't, I don't know. I remember hearing his name at some point but I don't know what, how old I was when it came in really. By the way, Paul called me this morning. Is today, I thought he said today is, is today Jack Kennedy's birthday?

AL: I don't know. The anniversary -?

KM: He said something about, to me, just laughingly, he says, you know, I thought he said, "Jack Kennedy would have been eighty-four today," and he says, "so if somebody wants to know how old you are, just tell them you're the same age as Jack Kennedy would have been." That's the kind of conversation Paul and I carry on. I mean it's like a non sequitur, you know, that was all he had to say. I don't know about that.

AL: So let's see, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

KM: Well, some of my happiest teaching, I taught thirty-five years.

AL: Oh, yes.

KM: Some of my happiest teaching, by the way, was at Wilton Academy. You can't return to those days, I'm sure. Of course, it was wooden building, we did everything we could to protect it from fire. And I commuted from Ash-, from Farmington I mean, over to Wilton every day, did that for six years. Nineteen sixty-three, yeah, through '69. In the fall of '69 they moved all of us over to Mt. Blue High School, you know. And I loved Mt. Blue High School, it isn't that, but it was quite a different spirit from Wilton Academy. I mean at Wilton Academy there was a spirit I'll never see duplicated. I mean, it had a tremendous support from the community, that goes without saying.

But furthermore, for example, because the hallways, the corridors were, you know, narrow, it was a wooden building, every student was made to march to, not march, but walk to classes on the right. Now, can you imagine trying to enforce that in any big school? Of course there were, I don't remember what the enrollment was, I mean Wilton Academy was a small school, but every kid was expected to keep to, bear to the right when he was marching to and from classes. And, you know, very few, I don't remember anybody trying to defy that, you know. And also, they were not allowed to wear caps. If you saw a kid wearing a cap, you just looked at him and pointed and he took the cap off, you know, there was no defiance in regard to it.

And, you know, and they walked, I think when I first went there, there were no buses. I can't remember they had any buses while I, the six years I was there, I don't remember seeing one. But they all got there. And I remember at the first faculty meeting, I said, "Well, what do we do," I said this to the principal, Morton Hamlin, excellent guy, oh, he was wonderful. I said, "Well, I need to know now, what do we do on days when there's no school, I mean, how are we notified?" Because I was living in Farmington. And he said, "We don't have any no school days." People walked and they crawled to get there.

And to show you how loyal the, what a loyal, feeling of loyalty there was there, for example, I can remember Morton Hamlin, who was, he enjoyed being Sherlock Holmes too, by the way, and I appreciated that. Because one day in his office he looked out and he saw a boy, I don't, his name was Phil, I don't remember his last name. And Phil was planting a huge nail behind the French teacher's car so that when the French teacher backed up he naturally would have gotten this nail in his tire. And Morton Hamlin dashed out of his office out onto the school grounds and grabbed the kid by the collar and hauled him into his office. He says, "You go home and stay for two weeks." And do you know, instead of rejoicing in it, Phil came back very much cowed about a week later and begged to come back to school.

Now, can you imagine that happening today? Nowadays I hear the kids go home and they say to their parents, "Oh, I got a couple weeks off, I've been kicked out of school, ha, I'm going to enjoy life." But Phil begged to come back and the principal says, "No, no." And the boy, we don't know now why he did it because he didn't even know the French teacher, he wasn't taking French. I mean, he just, for some reason put the nail behind this teacher's car, and he had no particular reason for choosing that teacher, he had no grudge. But, I mean, the principal made him stay out for two weeks.

AL: Was it 1980 when Wilton Academy burned down?

KM: You know, I don't remember. I remember when it, I remember it's burning, I don't remember -

AL: We had just moved to East Wilton one week before, my brother had one week in Wilton Academy and it burned down, and I can remember him being so upset. I think it was that feeling that you talk about, he was only there one week and it had already meant and felt like something to him. I think that was 1980 or '81.

KM: You probably are right, I just, I didn't remember the date. But, like everybody else, I cried when I went by it. I was in Farmington when I heard, in a department store, when I heard the fire alarms and when I, as soon as found out it was Wilton Academy that was on fire, I drove back to Wilton to view some of it.

No, we had a wonderful attitude there and feeling. And so as to give us teachers at least twenty minutes in order to eat our lunch in peace, the principal himself would go over to the gymnasium, which of course still exists. And as soon as the students had finished their lunches they were told to go over to the gym, and the principal somehow kept them busy and entertained them, all by himself, so that we teachers could have a duty free lunch period. Things were so much more informal.

And, you know, over there they used to have what was called a freshman reception. Of course it was a four-year school, secondary school, and the sophomores I think it was put on the "freshman reception". Now freshman receptions I never thought too much about. I mean, they were just pranks played on the freshmen and it was fun for the upperclassmen, but it was an entirely different thing there at Wilton Academy. I, and we teachers were expected to attend all of these functions, so of course I did, and glad of it. And I remember that first freshman reception that I attended, and the upperclassmen had planned all these different pranks, you know, for, activities for the freshmen. But, not only that, there were about four hundred parents and siblings in that gym along with the teachers attending this affair. And I was in charge of public speaking. Whenever I put on a public speaking activity people came in droves, I mean there was just this natural feeling of going to support, attending all the Wilton Academy functions in order to support the school and the students. It was unbelievable. I'd taught in other places and I'd never seen a turnout such as they provided.

AL: I think we're getting right to the end of the tape.

KM: Oh, just in time then.

AL: So, I will say thank you and, any other, anything else?

KM: I don't really think so. Oh, the CCC camps, I've thought a lot about that. I mean, they became very popular. FDR established CCC camps in 1933, and I remember, the Depression era, and it took a lot of young boys off the street. They had to be, you know, between seventeen and twenty-five. The nearest one to us was in Patton, Maine. But, you know, what a change it made in their lives. And can you imagine, they were paid, you know, thirty dollars a month, twenty-five dollars of which they had to send home to their families. And they were allowed to keep five dollars, which went quite a way, buy cigarettes and candy and so on. And they could take classes, they could learn a trade. And I often thought, oh, and they worked on the Appalachian Trail. There was a famous one up in Rangeley, too, as I understand it. And one, Mt., I think Mt. Blue State Park and Baxter State Park.

And I've often thought, you know, when the boys got restless and anti-authority there in different high schools in which I taught, that if they could only go to a CCC camp and provide some service, worthwhile service, like clearing trails and planting trees and so on, and helping

build some roads and so on, and using those big muscles, you know, what, they needed to. I've seen boys who were restless because they needed really to get away from their families and create friendships among their peers. CCC provided that. And actually then, you see, when WWII came along, a lot of them had got over the idea of homesickness, because they'd been away from home enough. And they were ready, you know, to, they'd learned discipline also at the CCC camps, and they'd learned a trade and they were able to go maybe into the service, and many, many did as I understand it. But I've often thought of those CCC camps, and the assistance they provided during the Depression, for young people. I've read that there were about eighteen thousand just in Maine alone that went into the CCCs. I think it ended in 1942, which sounds reasonable, doesn't it, because of the war? They planted trees, they did all kinds of civic activities.

AL: Great, thank you.

End of Interview